



Hello, my name is Melissa McLeod, and I'm a lifelong resident of Cache Valley. I'm a mother of five beautiful children ranging from 5 months to 12 years old. Unfortunately, I was diagnosed with Primary Sclerosing Cholangitis a liver disease, and Ulcerative Colitis, in 2007. Over the past three years, I've developed Cirrhosis of the liver, making it difficult for me to lead a normal life.

Things took a turn for the worse when I got pregnant with my fifth child at the beginning of 2022. My liver didn't respond well to the pregnancy, and I developed Ascites, a condition where my liver was leaking fluid into my abdomen. I looked like I was nine months pregnant by the time I was eight weeks along, and I had to undergo regular procedures called paracentesis to drain the fluid throughout my pregnancy.

The extra pressure in my body also caused esophageal varices, where blood was being redirected through veins in my throat, which were not equipped to handle large amounts of blood flow. If one of them burst spontaneously, I would have a high chance of bleeding out before I could get help. My doctors gave me two options: terminate the pregnancy or continue with it, but I would have a high chance of not living through it. **I chose option C, where both my baby and I would live.**

During regular endoscopies to have the varices banded to prevent bursting, one of them actually did burst, and I woke up two days later in the ICU. I was admitted to the hospital for the remainder of my pregnancy, spending 2.5 months being monitored daily and undergoing regular paracentesis and endoscopies. I couldn't see my other four kids during that time because visitors under the age of 12 weren't allowed. I was induced eight weeks early because the doctors were worried about my health, and my baby was born weighing just 3lbs 2oz. **She spent a month and a half in the NICU.**

Since then, I've had evaluations and tests done and I am finally listed on the national liver transplant list. However, I'm currently not eligible to have a living donor, so for now, it's just a waiting game. The liver disease has also caused osteoporosis, and I've had six compression fractures in my back. My platelets are extremely low, making it difficult for me to function normally.

I had to have platelet infusions before undergoing a procedure called Kyphoplasty, which helped fix my back, but I'm still in pain a lot. If I'm up preparing a meal, doing light housework, or walking through the grocery store for more than 15-20 minutes, my back seizes up, and I can't do anything else for the rest of the day.

My spleen is also extremely enlarged, causing me a lot of pain. A normal spleen is 10-12cm, but mine is 21.8cm. The doctors say it might get a little better after the transplant, but they won't do anything for it at this time.

All of these medical issues have caused significant financial burden. Your support will help me get the treatment I need not only live but also allow me to focus on taking care of my children. Thank you for your kindness and generosity.

Helping Hearts & Hands is sponsoring a Charity Golf Tournament on June 2, to help Melissa and Ivy with Transplant expenses. Please join us for a day of fun a donate generously to help our neighbors in need. Learn more at www.LMHhh.org